

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS NO LONGER PURSUING NATIONAL GUARD TRAINING AREA IN CLEARFIELD COUNTY

Fort Indiantown Gap (Nov. 15, 2000) -- Maj. Gen. William Lynch, state Adjutant General, today announced that the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs no longer will pursue plans to build a tracked-vehicle maneuver area for the Pennsylvania Army National Guard on a 4,700-acre site in Clearfield County. Agreements to purchase the land in Goshen and Girard townships will be allowed to expire without action on Nov. 30.

"Federal funds are absolutely essential for constructing and operating all military facilities," Maj. Gen. Lynch said. "The proposed site in Clearfield County is no exception. And two factors combine to raise serious questions about our eventual prospects for getting that funding.

"First is the persistent and vocal political opposition to the project. While we continue to believe that most people in Clearfield County would welcome the Guard and the positive economic benefits of this project, it has become clear that a small but vocal group of opponents would argue vigorously against the project to the federal government. Our experience has been that their opposition would make the difficult job of obtaining federal funding nearly impossible. The second factor is our environmental concerns. Although the preliminary environmental assessment on the site proved generally positive, there are outstanding concerns about potential liability for acid-mine drainage.

"Because of those two factors, we have determined that the Clearfield County project is not likely to win federal funding, and that we cannot justify the risk to taxpayers of further pursuing the purchase of this property.

"We will continue to search for a site for this important facility, and are confident we will find one that welcomes the Guard. We remain committed to ensuring the high state of National Guard readiness that our soldiers and the citizens of Pennsylvania deserve. We will work with the Department of General Services in the months ahead to explore other options for acquiring suitable training land."

The Pennsylvania National Guard long has sought to expand training opportunities within the state. Due to limited maneuver space at Fort Indiantown Gap, armored and mechanized units usually must travel to Fort Drum, New York; Fort Pickett, Virginia; and other out-of-state military bases. The resulting fuel costs and lengthy travel times detract from limited training budgets. In addition, a reliance on out-of-state facilities for food, lodging, maintenance and other logistical support represents an economic loss to Pennsylvania communities.

The land purchase in Clearfield County was authorized by near-unanimous votes of the General Assembly in 1997.